

LANGUAGE CHANGE

Languages change -- see the following example:

Old English (from the mid 5th century to the mid-12th century):
 God cwæþ to Abrahame: 'Nim þinne sunu Isaac, and far to þæm dunum, and
 geoffra hine þær uppan dune.'

'God said to Abraham: 'Take your son Isaac, and go to the hills, and offer [ie.,
 sacrifice] him there upon a hill'.

(Taken from the OE translation of the Bible)

Historical linguistic research does *not* stop with an account of the fact of language
 change.

OBJECTIVE: to seek explanations.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH: the only way to understand language change is to
 study it in progress. (Labov)

- 20th century linguists have studied language as if it were a
 homogeneous entity, whereas in actuality it is
 heterogeneous.
- Variations are important and relevant!

1. Variation and change

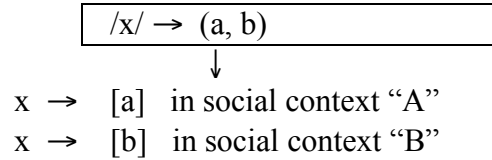
Three interrelated ways of variations in language:

- (i) over time
- (ii) in physical space
- (iii) socially

Study the example #2 on p. 207. Comment!
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All language change has its origin in variation!

Labov sees the grammar as consisting of rules of the type



Language change occurs, when

- (i) one of these variables, as a consequence of its association with some positive social index, comes to be favoured over the other;
- (ii) one of these variables becomes stigmatized and hence eliminated.

Important: *some* variations are associated with language change, but ALL variations are inherent properties of language.

1.1 Post-vocalic [r] – its spread and its status

Study the example #3 on p. 208.

What is the status of post-vocalic [r] in England?
What is the status of post-vocalic [r] in New York?

Changes from above: changes brought about consciously.

1.2 The spread of vernacular forms

Labov’s study (1963), continued from 1997-2002: Martha’s Vineyard: study the Example #4 and the summary of the research on p. 210.

Changes from below: changes from below conscious awareness.

Pronunciation changes are frequently are changes from below; for example, the merger of the pronunciation in New Zealand English of the vowels in *beer* and *bear*.

1.3 Koines and koineisation

Speakers of different dialects come into contact with each other in a monolingual speech community; the process of change is *koineisation*, and the resulting variety is a *koine*.

Study the example #5 on p. 212.

In the emergence of a *koine*, both linguistic and social processes need to be recognized.

(i) Linguistic processes: Leveling



fewer forms than in the source dialects, see the example of the disappearance of the postvocalic [r] in England.

Simplification



Out of two the forms existing in two dialects, the simpler will survive, for example, in the structures *he was swimming* and *they were swimming*, the variety that does not distinguish between these two tenses will win out.

(ii) Social processes: socially stigmatized forms tend to disappear, whereas forms that are associated with status will win out. Examples?

2. How do changes spread?

Study the Example #6, p. 214

2.1 From group to group

Linguistic changes spread in waves – social factors influence the *rate* and the *direction* of the change.

Why do the “middle” people may initiate changes? See Figure 9.1 on p. 215. Explain.

2.2 From style to style

The interaction of *two styles* – formal and casual -- with *social groups* may determine the spread of change:

Formal style (the group of highest prestige) → less formal style → to the lower social groups (Example: post-vocalic [r] in New York).

In Figure 9.2 there is model representing the spread of change in two speech styles and three social groups.

2.3 From word to word – lexical diffusion

Lexical diffusion: sound changes spread gradually through the words in which the change applies.

When a sound change begins (for example, the quality of a vowel will change), not all vowels suddenly become different -- the change occurs first in one word, then *gradually* spreads to the same vowel in other words.

Example: the resulting vowel in the merger of the vowel in *beer* and *bear* shows up in *really* and *rarely*, but not yet in *fear* and *fair*.

3. Reasons for language change

Which social group starts language change?

3.1 Social status and language change

- Speakers with the highest social status tend to introduce change from neighbouring communities of greater status;

For example, middle-class people from Norwich adopt prestige London pronunciations.

- Lower-class people are responsible for unconscious changes. For example, they adopt pronunciations by nearby workers: solidarity!

3.2 Gender and language change

Study the Example #10, p. 223

Tendencies:

- women introduce changes towards *both* prestige and vernacular forms;
- men tend to introduce more frequently vernacular changes.

Examples:

Ucieda, Spain (p. 223): women's pronunciation changes towards the standard form;

Martha's Vineyard: men lead the change towards the vernacular pronunciation: solidarity!

Important: women lead the change towards the standard where they are inspired to play a role in social life.

Muslim women in Iran or India: their lifestyle does not change, thus no need to pursue linguistic innovations.

3.3. Interaction and language change

In close-knit speech communities language change is slow – for example, Scottish Gaelic, Maori (far north and East Cape in New Zealand), Icelandic, etc.

CLOSE-KNIT NETWORKS MAY FUNCTION AS AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL MECHANISM FOR VERNACULAR MAINTENANCE.

Frequent interactions and attitude towards homogeneity contributes to preserving the language – slowing down language change.

The role of the individual innovator: Example #12, p. 227. Comment!

The role of the media – comment!

Kupwar village: an example of merging grammars:

Study the Example #13 and the explanation on pp. 228-230.



need for easy interaction
need for preserving identity

Consequence: these two factors impose a constraint on the rate and development of language change.

